Achieving Potential

Towards Improved Labour Market Outcomes for Aboriginal People

Ben Brunnen
Policy Analyst

Building the New West Project Report #19

September 2003

CanadaWest FOUNDATION

BUILDING THE NEW WEST

As part of the **Building the New West Project,** the Canada West Foundation is conducting the **Aboriginal Human Capital Strategies Initiative,** a one-year research study exploring the importance of Aboriginal people to helping meet western Canada's human capital needs. The objective of the research is to increase the availability and quality of information regarding labour market opportunities for western Canada's Aboriginal population, with an emphasis on positive, cooperative approaches that can be utilized to improve outcomes. *Achieving Potential: Towards Improved Labour Market Outcomes for Aboriginal People* is the first of three reports to be released under the **Aboriginal Human Capital Strategies Initiative.**

Ongoing advice for the project is provided by an advisory committee consisting of Paul Bercier (Metis National Council), Jim Carr (Business Council of Manitoba), Tara Gilbert (Aboriginal Community Career Employment Services Society, ACCESS), Wayne Helgason (Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development), Roberta Hewson (Partners for Careers), Eric Howe (Department of Economics, University of Saskatchewan), Carlos James (Government of Manitoba), John Kozij (Human Resources and Development Canada), Gerry Kushlyk (Alberta Aboriginal and Northern Affairs), Kelly Lendsay (Aboriginal Human Resource Development Council of Canada), Allan MacDonald (Privy Council Office), Ray McKay (Kitsaki Management Ltd. Partnership), Bill McLaughlin (Northlands College), Lisa Nye (BC Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services), John Richards (Faculty of Business Administration, Simon Fraser University), Noel Starblanket (Assembly of First Nations), and Ian Taylor (Congress of Aboriginal Peoples). *The views expressed in this document are not necessarily held in full or in part by the advisory committee members or the organizations they represent.*

This report was prepared by Canada West Foundation Policy Analyst Ben Brunnen. The opinions expressed in this document are the author's only and are not necessarily held in full or in part by the Canada West Foundation's donors, subscribers, advisors, or Board.

The author and the Canada West Foundation express their appreciation to Calvin Hanselmann for his research contributions and mentorship, as well as to the advisory committee and everyone who agreed to be interviewed for this report.

The Canada West Foundation sincerely thanks the organizations that provided the funding necessary for the *Aboriginal Human Capital Strategies Initiative:* the Kahanoff Foundation; the Government of Canada (Western Economic Diversification Canada, Human Resources and Development Canada, and the Privy Council Office); British Columbia Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services; Alberta Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development; Manitoba Advance Education and Training; Royal Bank of Canada; Petro Canada; and an anonymous philanthropic foundation.

Permission to use or reproduce this report is granted for personal or classroom use without fee and without formal request. Copies may not be made or distributed for profit or commercial advantage. Additional copies are available from the Canada West Foundation, or may be downloaded from the CWF website [www.cwf.ca].

© 2003 Canada West Foundation
ISBN 1-894825-24-1

Executive Summary

In recent years industry and labour market analysts have indicated that Canada will experience a sizable labour supply shortage in the decades ahead. In a society characterized by early retirement, an aging population and declining birth rates, the number of individuals entering the labour market is forecasted to fall below the number of those exiting. The Aboriginal population presents a unique opportunity for policy makers to alleviate future labour market pressures.

The Aboriginal population, which comprises 3.3% of Canada's total population or almost one million individuals, is relatively younger than the non-Aboriginal population. More than one in three Aboriginal people are younger than 15 years of age, compared to fewer than one in five non-Aboriginal people. This means a large influx of young Aboriginal people into the labour market in upcoming years. As one Canada West Foundation interview respondent put it: "The Aboriginal population represents the largest untapped labour force in Canada, and thus it makes good economic sense to engage the Aboriginal population."

Western Canada has a great incentive to seize this opportunity. Over 62% of the Aboriginal population resides in the West, where more than one in ten under 15 years of age identify as Aboriginal – a sizable contrast to that of Canada as a whole, which has just over one out of every 20 identifying themselves as Aboriginal.

The benefits of ensuring that every opportunity exists for Aboriginal people to obtain the human capital needed to participate fully and successfully in the Canadian economy, extend beyond economic factors. First, Aboriginal people will experience tremendous benefits, including decreased poverty levels, increased economic independence, improved housing situations, higher incomes, improved health outcomes and positive youth role models. Second, the effects will impact the lives of all Canadians – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike. The stresses on employment and social services programs will be reduced, the social fabric and cultural diversity of Canadian society will become further enriched, and labour resources within the economy will be allocated more efficiently, leading to increased productivity and innovation, and hence an improved quality of life for all Canadians.

Achieving Potential: Towards Improved Labour Market Outcomes for Aboriginal People addresses the Aboriginal human capital opportunities that exist in the West by (1) using 2001 Census data to investigate the educational and labour market disparities between the Aboriginal and general populations; (2) by assessing public opinion survey data to determine whether western Canadians are aware of the economic and social opportunities inherent in ensuring Aboriginal people enjoy positive education and labour market outcomes, and (3) by deriving promising practices for improving Aboriginal labour market outcomes, based upon evidence from interviews with key individuals directly involved in Aboriginal education and labour market issues.

Key Findings

Labour market –The labour market challenges facing Aboriginal people do not stem from an unwillingness to participate in the labour market, but rather from a lack of success in securing and retaining employment.

Educational attainments – The percentage of Aboriginal people in western Canada with less than a high school diploma is considerably greater than that of the general population.

The influence of education on labour market outcomes – The unemployment rate for Aboriginal people with less than a high school diploma is 27%, compared to 5% for those holding a university degree.

Western Canadians are generally receptive to creating opportunities to improve Aboriginal labour market outcomes – Over 75% of western Canadians place a high or medium priority on increasing Aboriginal employment as a government policy.

Promising practices to address Aboriginal labour market disparities – The promising practices are based on ideas that were strongly emphasized by interview respondents, several of which are listed below.

Perform comprehensive evaluations of goals – Communicate with Aboriginal people to identify career and educational aspirations, and promote sustainable outcomes that create transferable skill sets.

Reinforce the value of education – Focus on incentives for motivating specific individuals to attend school.

Consider social conditions – Workplace alienation, individual aspirations, transition adjustments, life skills levels, family and community influences, access to financial or social support structures, and sense of identity all influence decisions and outcomes.

Recognize, reward and celebrate successes – Recognizing success and achievement reinforces identity and belonging.

104-06904/

I. Introduction

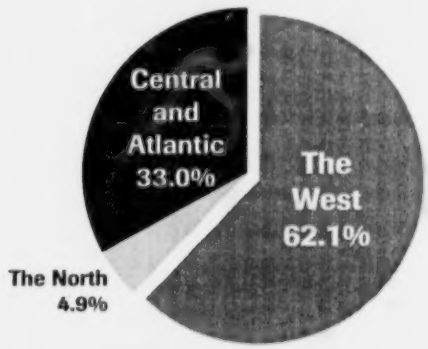
In recent years, a number of analysts and industry sectors have expressed concern that Canada will not have a sufficient labour supply to meet its employment needs in the decades ahead. In fact, a report released September 2 by the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions (the primary regulator of federally chartered financial institutions), states that, in less than ten years, Canada will start to face its most severe shortage of labour ever (Office of the Superintendent 2003). The imminent "crisis" is the result of an aging population, declining birth rates, and a culture that celebrates early retirement.

Western Canada, however, possesses an under-appreciated opportunity to deal with this potential challenge. The West is home to 62.1% of Canada's Aboriginal identity population (Figure 1), a population that is considerably younger than the national average. However, the Aboriginal population does not currently enjoy the same high employment levels as the non-Aboriginal population; hence, there is an opportunity to improve the employment outcomes of Aboriginal people, while addressing future labour market shortages.

As one of Canada West's interview respondents put it, "Aboriginal people represent the largest untapped labour force in Canada, and thus it makes good economic sense to engage the Aboriginal population."

The benefits of improving labour market outcomes among Aboriginal people are not limited to the economy; Aboriginal people will experience tremendous benefits as well. These include increased economic independence, decreased poverty levels, improved housing situations, improved health outcomes and positive youth role models – in other words, an overall higher quality of life. For these

Figure 1: Aboriginal Population by Location, 2001 Census (% of national total)



Source: Statistics Canada Census

reasons, it is important that western Canadian governments, businesses and communities work together to ensure that every opportunity exists for Aboriginal people to acquire the human capital (defined as the education, training, and skills that people bring to the labour market) necessary to participate successfully and fully in the labour market.

Achieving Potential: Towards Improved Labour Market Outcomes for Aboriginal People is the first of three Canada West Foundation reports that will explore the human capital opportunities for western Canada's Aboriginal people. *Achieving Potential* will address three key questions:

- What are the current labour market and education realities for Aboriginal people in western Canada?
- Are westerners aware of the opportunities inherent in addressing Aboriginal labour market disparities?
- What are the promising practices to improve current labour market outcomes for Aboriginal people?

These questions will be answered through an assessment of 2001 Census data, Canada West Foundation's *Looking West*

2003 public opinion data, and, most importantly, in-depth personal interviews with Aboriginal people, government officials, business and community leaders.

Two future Canada West Foundation reports will examine educational approaches and key trends in employment outcomes for Aboriginal people. It should be stressed that, while Canada West's research is focused on western Canada's Aboriginal population, the promising practices outlined in the research have relevance and application across Canada.

The Canada West Foundation believes that addressing this policy issue will benefit western Canada and its people, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike. As western Canada's leading public policy research institute, with over 30 years expertise in western Canadian public policy issues, the Foundation has a legitimate role to play in conducting the necessary research to inform public and policymaker debate about Aboriginal human capital strategies.

II. What are the current Aboriginal labour market and education realities in the West?

The labour market outcomes of Aboriginal individuals are perceived to be less positive than those of the general population. But to what extent are these perceptions a reality? To address this question, consideration must be given to the labour market outcomes and educational attainments of the Aboriginal population in comparison with the general population. Doing so allows for an understanding of the extent of the disparities, as well as the employment implications of various educational attainments.

The 2001 Census is the primary data source for exemplifying these disparities. Despite the limitations of the Census, which may include incomplete on-reserve enumeration and the potential for undercounting in urban and rural areas, the Census remains the most accurate and comprehensive source of quantitative information available about the Aboriginal population of Canada.

Readers should note that the Aboriginal identity population, which consists of those individuals who reported identifying with at least one Aboriginal group (e.g., North American Indian, Métis and Inuit), is the measure used as the Aboriginal population throughout this report. The Census also collects data on the Aboriginal origin population, defined as those individuals who report at least one Aboriginal origin to the ethnic origin Census question. Ethnic origin refers to the ethnic or cultural groups to which the respondents' ancestors belong. The ethnic origin population in Canada reported in 2001 is 1,319,890 people, while the 2001 Aboriginal identity population in Canada is 976,305 people.

All of the data include residents both on and off reserve. For the population demographic analyses, the data include individuals in all age groups and educational status – both attending and not attending school, and comparisons are made between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations. However, in the education and labour market analyses, the data set is limited to only those individuals 15 years and older, who are currently not attending school, and comparisons are made between the Aboriginal and general populations.

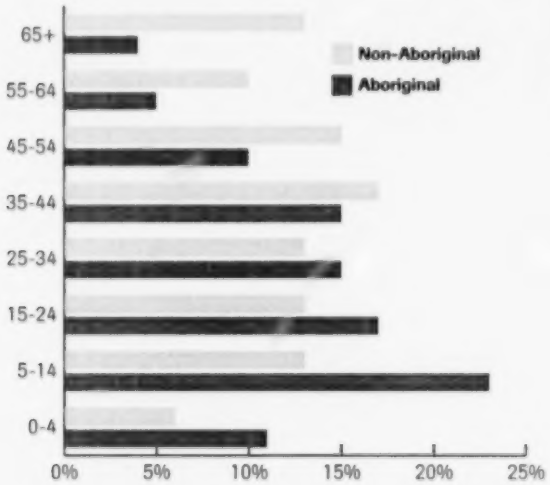
As noted earlier, western Canada is home to the majority of Canada's Aboriginal people. British Columbia and Alberta have the highest Aboriginal identity populations of the western provinces, but the lowest proportionate levels relative to the general population, while Manitoba and Saskatchewan have the highest proportionate Aboriginal identity populations, but the fewest total population

Figure 2: Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Populations by Location, 2001 Census

	Aboriginal		Non-Aboriginal	
	#	%	#	%
MB	150,040	(13.6%)	953,655	(86.4%)
SK	130,190	(13.5%)	832,960	(86.5%)
AB	156,220	(5.3%)	2,784,930	(94.7%)
BC	170,025	(4.4%)	3,698,850	(95.6%)
West	606,475	(6.8%)	8,270,395	(93.2%)
Canada	976,305	(3.3%)	28,662,725	(96.7%)

Source: Statistics Canada Census

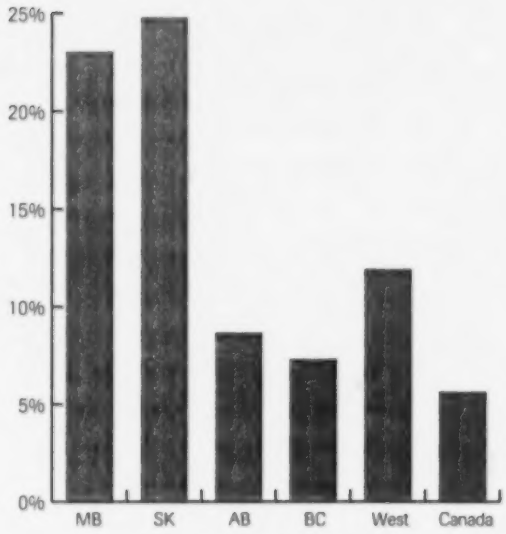
Figure 3: Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Population by Age Group, Canada, 2001 Census



Source: Statistics Canada Census

numbers (Figure 2). All four of the western provinces have higher proportionate values than Canada (3.3%), and 6.8% of the population of the West as a whole identify as Aboriginal people, more than twice the national figure.

Figure 4: Aboriginal Percentage of the Population 0-14 Years of Age, 2001 Census

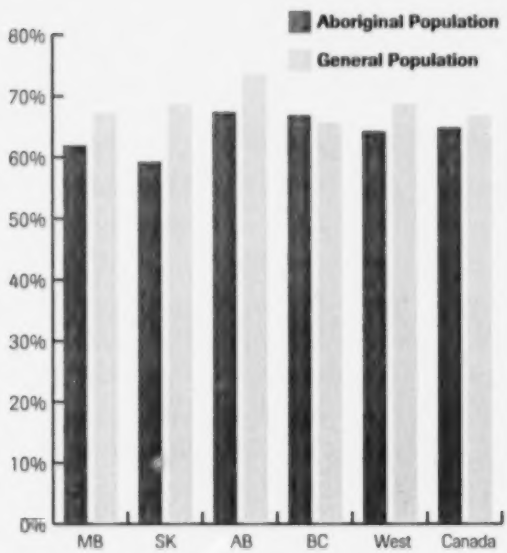


Source: Statistics Canada Census

One important characteristic of the Aboriginal population is that it is younger than the non-aboriginal population (Figure 3). According to the 2001 Census, 65.7% of the Aboriginal identity population is between the ages of 0 and 34, compared with 45.6% of the non-Aboriginal population. Of particular interest is the contrast between the two groups for the ages 0 to 14: one in three Aboriginal people is less than 15 years of age, compared to fewer than one in five non-Aboriginal people.

There are noteworthy provincial differences in the "age gap" of the youth between the Aboriginal and general populations (Figure 4). For the West as a whole more than one in ten youth under 15 years of age identify as Aboriginal, a sizable contrast to that of Canada as a whole, which has just over one out of every 20. Of particular interest are these values for Saskatchewan and Manitoba, where one out of every four and one out of every five youth under 15 identifies as an Aboriginal person respectively. Among the western

Figure 5: Participation Rates, 2001 Census



Source: Statistics Canada Census

provinces, BC exhibits the least Aboriginal representation in this cohort. Overall, as a consequence of its relative youth, the Aboriginal population will constitute an increased percentage of western Canada's total labour force in the future.

Labour Market Disparities

Given the relatively larger youth cohort of Aboriginal people in the West, it is important to understand the extent of the labour market disparities between the Aboriginal and general populations. Awareness of any disparities will enable policymakers, business leaders, Aboriginal people and educators to better work together to positively address these disparities.

The analysis of the labour market begins with a look at the differences in the participation rates between the Aboriginal and general populations. The participation rate is calculated as the number of individuals in the labour force (both employed and unemployed) divided by the population 15 years and older. Participation rates in general provide an indication of a group's affinity to participate in the labour force, and implies variations in individuals' propensities to attend school, retire or become homemakers.

In addition, analysis of participation rates may detect the presence of the "discouraged worker phenomenon" – the idea that an individual withdraws from the labour force after a long period of unsuccessful job searching. To reiterate, the population used in the education and labour market analyses consists of those individuals 15 years and older who are not attending school.

The Aboriginal population has lower participation rates than the general population in the West and in Canada as a whole (Figure 5). Yet participation rates differ across the four western provinces: Saskatchewan has the greatest variation between the Aboriginal and general populations for participation rates, while in BC the Aboriginal population participates in the labour market more so than does the general population.

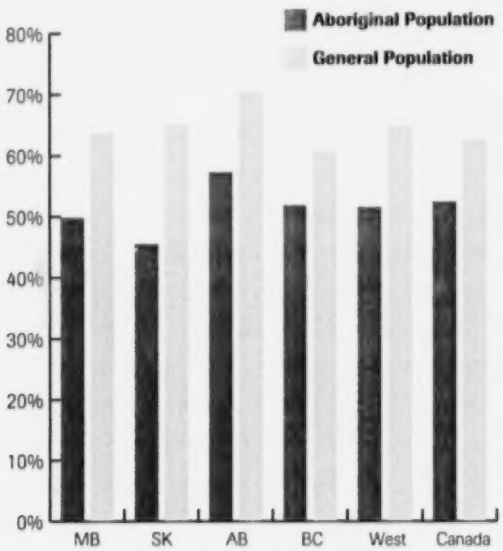
Are the differences between the Aboriginal and general populations substantial? In order to get a better idea of the relative disparity between the two groups' participation rates, we calculated a series of indices by dividing the percentage values for the Aboriginal population over the percentage values of the general population (Figure 6). The

Figure 6: The Participation Index

MB	0.92
SK	0.86
AB	0.92
BC	1.02
West	0.93
Canada	0.93

Source: Derived from Statistics Canada Census data

Figure 7: Employment Rates, 2001 Census



Source: Statistics Canada Census

closer the index value is to one, the more equally represented are the two groups within the category. An index value greater than one is indicative of proportionately higher Aboriginal representation in the category. An index value less than one is indicative of proportionately less Aboriginal representation in the category. The reader should note that these indices not only measure the labour market disparities between the Aboriginal and general populations, but also control for the influence of provincial factors such as variations in minimum wage rates, employment insurance benefits and cost of living differentials, thus rendering the provincial index values to be comparable.

The indices reveal that the variations in the participation rates of the Aboriginal and general populations are relatively minimal in each province. Aboriginal participation rates in Manitoba, Alberta and British Columbia are greater than 90% those of the general population, and only in Saskatchewan is the participation index value less than 0.90. These results suggest similar affinities of the two groups to participate in the labour force. Thus, the data do not present reason to suspect the existence of the discouraged worker phenomenon.

Of course, participation rates do not provide an understanding of employment gaps. In order to assess this, it is necessary to look at differences in employment rates between the Aboriginal and general populations. The employment rate is defined as the number of people employed, divided by the population 15 years and older. In other words the employment rate considers the full population, including those participating in the labour market and those who, for whatever reason, are not participating in the labour market. It provides a useful indication of the labour market outcomes of a particular group, especially when compared to the participation rate. As the employment rate value approaches that of the participation rate, the number of individuals who are able to find employment nears that of the number of individuals seeking employment in the labour force. The differences in the employment rates between the Aboriginal and general populations are more pronounced than those of the participation rates (Figure 7); relatively fewer members of the Aboriginal population are employed, in comparison to the general population.

The employment index quantifies the relative employment differences, where a value of one indicates that the employment rates between the two groups are identical, while a value less than one is indicative of proportionately lower Aboriginal employment rates (Figure 8).

When comparing the employment index to the participation index, it is clear that for each geographic category, the employment index values are consistently less than the

Figure 8: The Employment Index

MB	0.78
SK	0.70
AB	0.81
BC	0.85
West	0.80
Canada	0.83

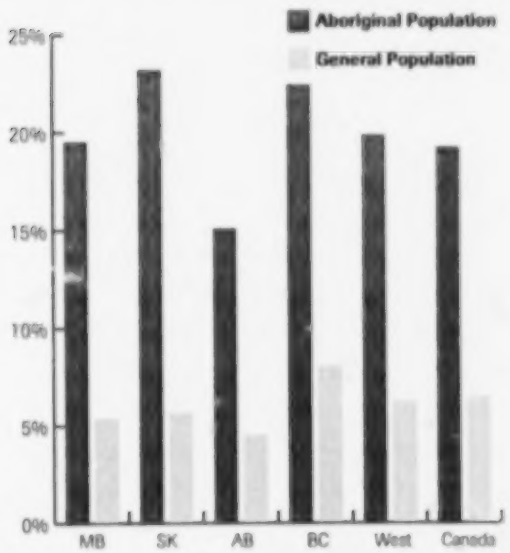
Source: Derived from Statistics Canada Census data

participation index values (by an amount of at least 0.10). These results indicate that the proportion of the Aboriginal population who are able to find employment, out of those who are seeking it, is less than that for the general population. Clearly, while the participation rate gap is modest, the employment gap is considerable.

To further the analysis of labour market conditions, the unemployment rates are examined. Unemployment rates are defined as the number of people unemployed divided by the number of people participating in the labour force (both employed and unemployed). The unemployment rate is useful in that it measures discrepancies only within the labour market; it excludes individuals who have chosen to opt out of the labour market, be it for retirement, child rearing, or for any other reason. In other words, one must be actively looking for work to be "unemployed." It is in unemployment rates that the gaps between the Aboriginal and general population become the most pronounced. In the western provinces, the unemployment rate of the Aboriginal population is more than triple that of the general population (Figure 9).

An unemployment index is created by dividing the Aboriginal unemployment rate by that of the general population (Figure 10). Again the closer the index value is to one, the more equally represented are the two groups within the category. An index value greater than one indicates proportionately higher Aboriginal unemployment

Figure 9: Unemployment Rates, 2001 Census



Source: Statistics Canada Census

Figure 10: The Unemployment Index

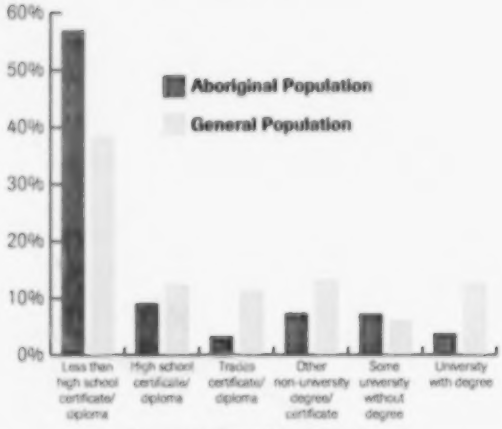
MB	3.6
SK	4.1
AB	3.3
BC	2.8
West	3.2
Canada	3.0

Source: Derived from Statistics Canada Census data

and an index value less than one indicates proportionately lower Aboriginal unemployment. The index values display evidence of a sizeable unemployment gap, where Aboriginal people are disproportionately over represented among the unemployed. The index values for Manitoba and Saskatchewan are the highest, indicating the greatest relative disparity in their provincial labour markets. This is a striking finding given that Manitoba and Saskatchewan have the highest proportionate Aboriginal populations.

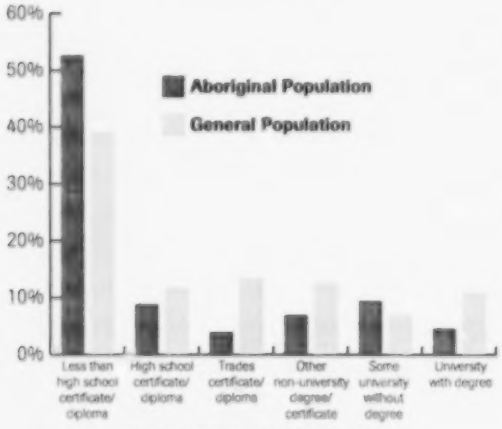
Even more interesting are the discrepancies between the

Figure 11: Manitoba Education Gap, 2001 Census



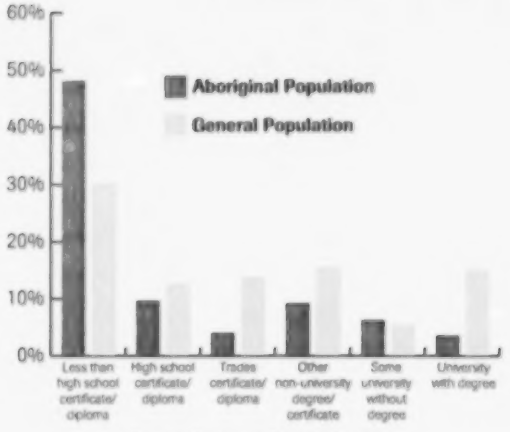
Source: Statistics Canada Census

Figure 12: Saskatchewan Education Gap, 2001 Census



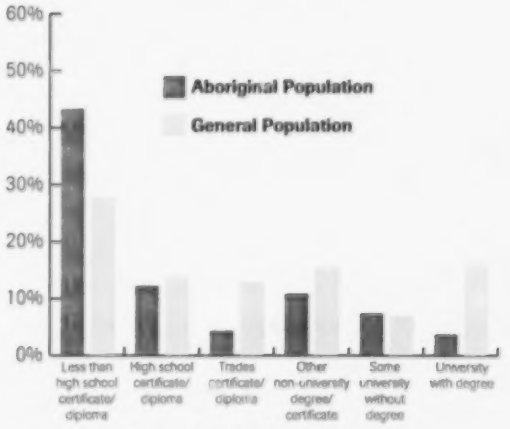
Source: Statistics Canada Census

Figure 13: Alberta Education Gap, 2001 Census



Source: Statistics Canada Census

Figure 14: BC Education Gap, 2001 Census



Source: Statistics Canada Census

index values for the participation rates and for the unemployment rates. In the West, the participation rate for Aboriginal people in the labour force is 93% that of the general population, yet the unemployment rate of the Aboriginal population is 3.2 times greater. These data suggest that the labour market challenges facing Aboriginal people do not stem from an unwillingness to participate in the labour market, but rather from a lack of success in securing and retaining employment. This conclusion raises two important questions. First, what explains the high unemployment levels among Aboriginal people? And second, how long will it be until Aboriginal individuals in the

Figure 15: Educational Attainment Index, 2001 Census

	MB	SK	AB	BC	West	Can.
Less than high school certificate/diploma	1.5	1.3	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.5
High school certificate/diploma	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.9	0.8	0.7
Trades certificate/diploma	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.4
Other non-university degree/certificate	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.6	0.6
Some university without degree	1.2	1.4	1.1	1.0	1.2	1.3
University with degree	0.3	0.4	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3

Source: Statistics Canada Census

labour force become "discouraged workers" and withdraw, thereby reducing the unemployment rate at the expense of labour market participation?

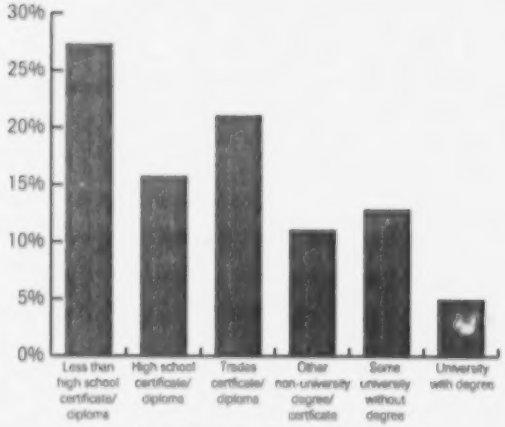
Education Disparities

A very large part of the unemployment gap between the Aboriginal and general populations may be explained by differences in the educational attainments of these two populations. Figures 11 through 14 depict the education gaps for the four western provinces. An obvious pattern is seen in each province: the Aboriginal population is proportionately over-represented in the less than high school graduation certificate cohort, and thus proportionately under-represented among those with high school certificates and post-secondary degrees.

This pattern is demonstrated more plainly with the educational attainment index (Figure 15). For the West as a whole, the proportion of Aboriginal people with less than a high school diploma is 1.6 times greater than the general population, and the proportion of Aboriginal people with a university degree is 30% that of the general population. As well, the proportion of Aboriginal individuals holding a trade certificate/diploma is consistent across the West at 30% that of the general population.

However, two provinces are particularly noteworthy. The

Figure 16: Unemployment Rate by Educational Attainment, Aboriginal Population, Canada, 2001 Census



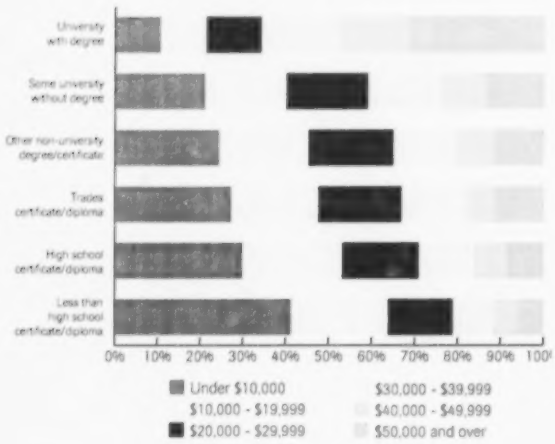
Source: Statistics Canada Census

Aboriginal populations in Manitoba and Saskatchewan have the lowest index values for the "Less than high school" category, and the least negative index values for the "University with degree" category. It follows that for these two categories, Manitoba and Saskatchewan are slightly closer to having equal representation between the Aboriginal and general population groups than are Alberta and BC. This raises a perplexing question: why do Saskatchewan and Manitoba have the most positive Aboriginal educational outcomes, and yet still have the highest unemployment index values? These findings demonstrate that while education can be part of the explanation of higher Aboriginal unemployment, other factors also come into play.

The Influence of Educational Attainments on Labour Market Outcomes

To assess the influence of education, it is useful to compare educational attainments to labour market outcomes for the Aboriginal identity population in Canada. In Figure 16 the highest unemployment rate among the Aboriginal population is associated with the "Less than high school

Figure 17: Employment Income by Educational Attainment, Aboriginal Population, Canada, 2001 Census



Source: Statistics Canada Census

certificate/diploma" category, while the lowest unemployment rate is associated with the "University with degree" category. In other words, the employment success of Aboriginal people is improved with education. That said, individuals in the "Trades certificate or diploma" category have the second highest unemployment rate, even greater than those with a high school completion certificate.

In addition to experiencing lower unemployment rates as educational attainments increase, Aboriginal people with higher education levels also enjoy greater employment incomes (Figure 17).

Of the Aboriginal population who do not possess a high school graduation certificate, 41% earn less than $10,000 per year. As individuals' education levels increase, the percentage of those earning less than $10,000 per year decreases. As well, the probability of earning $40,000 or more increases as one's educational attainment increases. This is exemplified in the "University with degree" category, where 48% of those individuals holding a university degree are earning $40,000 per year or more, and only 11% of those without a high school degree are earning $40,000 or more.

The positive employment and income earnings associated with educational attainments demonstrate that there is a clear benefit to higher education. Not only do more than 30% of Aboriginal people with a university degree earn more than $50,000 per year, but also the unemployment rate for those holding a university degree is 5.0% – the lowest level for any educational attainment.

To summarize, there are a number of important labour market gaps between the Aboriginal and general populations. The first is the age gap: the Aboriginal population is younger than the non-Aboriginal population, with over one in three Aboriginal people less than 15 years of age. This means that there will be a large influx of young Aboriginal people into the labour market in upcoming years. The second gap is the unemployment gap. Despite similar labour participation rates, the unemployment rate of the Aboriginal population is more than three times that of the general population. In other words, while Aboriginal people are participating in the labour market, they are experiencing less success in securing and retaining employment. The third gap is the education gap: the percentage of Aboriginal people in western Canada with less than a high school diploma is significantly greater than that of the general population, it follows that the percentage of Aboriginal people with a post-secondary degree or certificate is significantly lower. The education gap has strong implications for both employment success and income.

Each of these gaps has an effect on western Canada's future labour market. If Aboriginal unemployment and education rates become closer to parity with those of the general population, the results will be extremely positive for both Aboriginal people and the western Canadian economy.

However if these gaps remain unaltered, Aboriginal people will continue to experience lower qualities of life, and western Canada will forego an important opportunity to address its labour market needs. To what extent are western Canadians aware of the need to address these gaps? Are western Canadians likely to support government and business efforts to address these gaps? It is to these questions that the analysis turns.

III. Are western Canadians aware of the opportunities inherent in improving Aboriginal labour market outcomes?

Addressing the unemployment and education disparities will require policy and programming efforts by governments, businesses, Aboriginal communities and the non-profit sector, thus it is useful to understand the general public's attitude regarding Aboriginal employment issues. If western Canadians have a positive attitude towards increasing opportunities for Aboriginal people, they are more likely to support efforts to create such opportunities. Conversely, if western Canadians have a negative attitude regarding these issues, they are more likely to oppose such efforts. Understanding public opinion, therefore, can assist governments and others in communicating the importance of policies and programs designed to create educational and employment opportunities for Aboriginal people in western Canada. The *Looking West 2003* survey allows for an examination of public attitudes.

Looking West 2003 is a telephone survey commissioned by the Canada West Foundation that was administered between January 22 and February 18, 2003 by Western Opinion Research. A sample of 3,202 residents was interviewed in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia. Sample characteristics are given in Figure 18. Readers should note that a weighting factor based on provincial population sizes is applied to create a representative regional sample. Non-responses are not reported in the figures, and as a result displayed figures may not sum to 100%. (For more information on the *Looking West* survey see Berdahl 2003).

Figure 18: 2003 Looking West Survey Sample

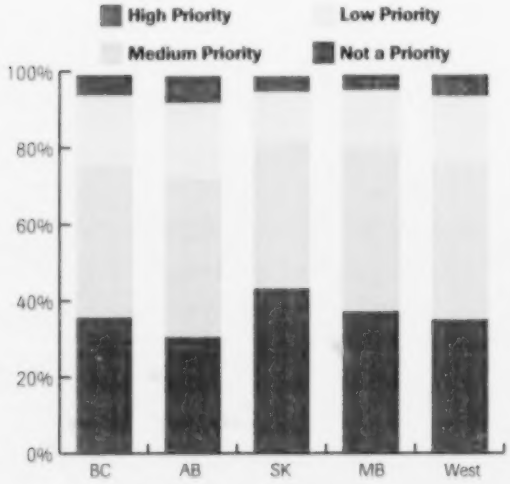
	n	Margin of Error +/- 95 times out of 100
MB	800	3.46%
SK	800	3.46%
AB	800	3.46%
BC	802	3.46%
West	3,202	1.73%

Source: Canada West Foundation Looking West Survey 2003

The *Looking West 2003* survey asked respondents three questions related to the Aboriginal population. The first question presented is: "Thinking about what governments can do to ensure the future prosperity and quality of life in [province], would you rate increasing Aboriginal employment levels as a high priority, a medium priority, a low priority, or not a priority?" In the West as a whole, 35.0% of the respondents indicate that Aboriginal employment is a high priority, while 40.8% say that it is a medium priority (Figure 19). Saskatchewan and Manitoba residents have the highest percentage of respondents indicating a high priority (43.2% and 37.1% respectively), while Alberta and British Columbia have the highest percentage of respondents indicating that it is a low or not a priority (26.9% and 23.4% respectively). It is worth noting that respondents from the two provinces with the higher Aboriginal unemployment rates are the most likely to rate increasing Aboriginal employment levels as a high government priority.

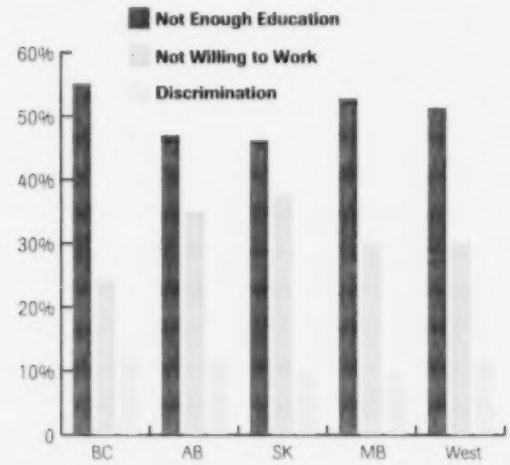
A second question related to Aboriginal employment that was posed to respondents is: "Which of the following

Figure 19: Priority Placed on Increasing Aboriginal Employment Levels



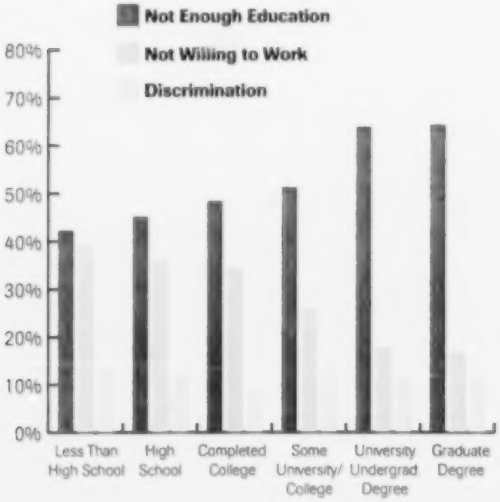
Source: Canada West Foundation Looking West Survey 2003

Figure 20: Reasons Given for Low Aboriginal Employment Levels



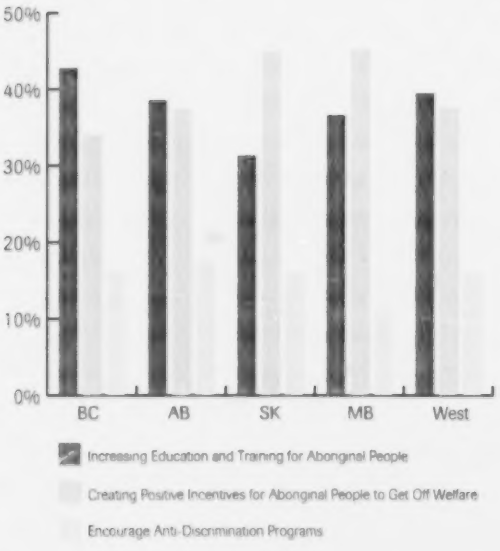
Source: Canada West Foundation Looking West Survey 2003

Figure 21: Reason Given for Low Aboriginal Employment Levels by Education



Source: Canada West Foundation Looking West Survey 2003

Figure 22: Best Policy to Increase Aboriginal Employment Levels



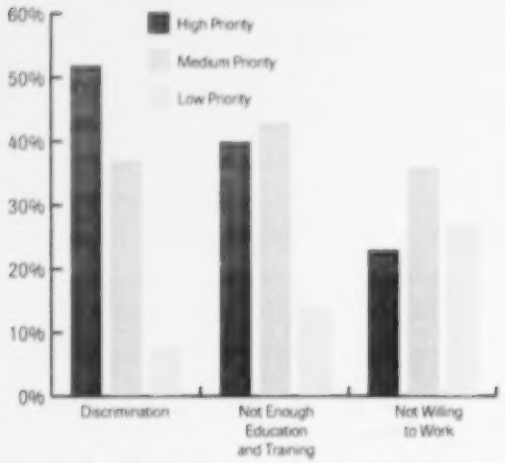
Source: Canada West Foundation Looking West Survey 2003

statements comes closest to your own views: low Aboriginal employment levels are because of discrimination against Aboriginal people; low Aboriginal employment levels are because Aboriginal people do not have the education and training required to get jobs; low Aboriginal employment levels are because Aboriginal people are not willing to work?" Saskatchewan residents are most likely to state "not willing to work" as the reason and BC residents are most likely to state "not enough education and training" as the reason. Within the West as a whole, "not enough education and training" is the response with the greatest frequency (Figure 20).

In addition, attitudes toward low Aboriginal unemployment vary with urban size: respondents in census metropolis areas (CMAs) have the highest propensity to cite "Not enough education and training" as the reason for lower Aboriginal employment outcomes, while residents in small towns are the most likely to say, "Not willing to work" is the reason. The educational attainment of respondents influences perceptions as well. For the West as a whole, as the educational attainment of the respondents increases, the propensity to state, "Aboriginals are not willing to work" as the reason decreases, and the propensity to state "not enough education and training" as the reason increases (Figure 21). This relationship suggests that higher educational attainments, lead to an increased awareness of Aboriginal labour market issues.

The third question presented that was posed to respondents is: "Which of the following should be the first priority of governments to increase Aboriginal employment levels: increasing education and training for Aboriginal people; creating positive incentives for Aboriginal people to get off welfare; encouraging workplace anti-discrimination programs; removing union barriers; enacting employment equity programs?" The results are presented in Figure 22

Figure 23: Priority Placed on Increasing Aboriginal Employment Levels by Reason Given

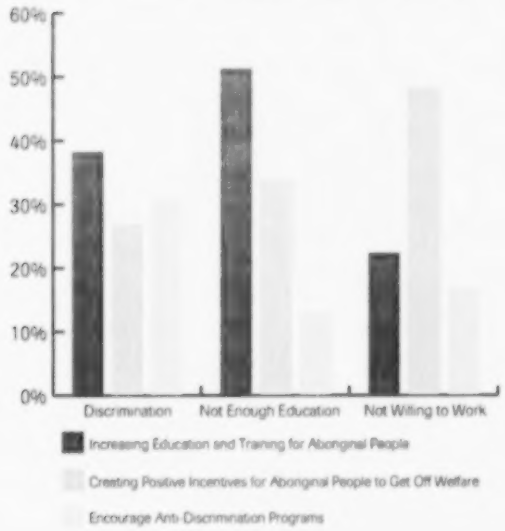


Source: Canada West Foundation Looking West Survey 2003

(note that the latter three response categories were combined to create the "encourage anti-discrimination programs" bar). For the West as a whole, respondents are almost evenly split between "increase education and training" (40%) and "create positive incentives to get off welfare" (38%) as the best policy to increase Aboriginal employment levels. BC and Alberta respondents are most likely to cite "increase education and training" as the best policy, while respondents in Saskatchewan and Manitoba most frequently cite "create positive incentives to get off welfare" as the best policy. It is particularly noteworthy that respondents in Manitoba and Saskatchewan are most likely to state, "create positive incentives to get off welfare" as the best policy, yet the plurality in each province indicate the reason is "not enough education and training."

How do these three survey questions relate to each other? There is a correlation between the priority one assigns to increasing Aboriginal employment levels (the first question presented) and the reasons one gives for lower employment levels (the second question presented). Respondents whose

Figure 24: Best Policy to Increase Aboriginal Employment Levels by Reason Given



Source: Canada West Foundation Looking West Survey 2003

stated reason is "not willing to work" have the highest propensity to indicate a low or no priority, and those whose stated reason is "discrimination" have the highest propensity to give Aboriginal employment a high priority.

In addition, when comparing individuals' responses to the stated reason for lower employment levels (the second question presented) to their responses for the perceived best policy to increase Aboriginal employment (the third question presented), those who say the reason is "discrimination" or "not enough education and training" are most likely to indicate that the best policy is to increase education and training. However, those who indicate that the reason is "not willing to work" are most likely to state that the best policy is to "create positive incentives to get off welfare."

What do these survey data indicate about the receptiveness of western Canadians to policies and programs designed to increase Aboriginal education and employment levels? Overall, the data are quite positive, and suggest that the general public should be relatively receptive to such policies and programs. Over 75% of westerners place a high or medium priority on increasing Aboriginal employment, and the majority of westerners cite "not enough education and training" as the reason for low Aboriginal employment levels, rather than "not willing to work." Although the best policies for alleviating low Aboriginal employment levels vary among provinces, the most frequently cited policy in the West is increasing the education and training for Aboriginal people. As well, educated individuals are most likely to have positive attitudes toward improving Aboriginal opportunities – an important variation to note, since many political, business and community leaders, who are in the positions to create such opportunities, have university degrees.

IV. What are the promising practices to improve current labour market outcomes for Aboriginal people?

So far, the analysis has identified that there are important education and unemployment gaps between the Aboriginal and general populations, that Aboriginal people are participating in the labour market at near-equal rates to the general population, that there is a positive relationship between Aboriginal educational attainments and employment outcomes, and that the general public is likely to be receptive to policies and programs designed to increase Aboriginal educational and employment levels. The last question to address is what steps can the various groups – governments, Aboriginal communities, businesses, non-profit organizations, and others – take to reduce the unemployment gaps?

To answer this final question, the Canada West Foundation identified "promising practices" – ideas, strategies and concepts that work in improving the employment outcomes of Aboriginal people. These promising practices are based

on evidence from 25 key informant interviews conducted between March and June 2003 by the Canada West Foundation. Information from the interviews was supplemented by documents provided by interview subjects and other organizations, as well as a review of relevant literature. Interview subjects were chosen using the snowball method of non-probability sampling, and included government representatives, educators at primary, secondary and post-secondary institutions, representatives of private industry, Aboriginal awareness seminar providers, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal service delivery organizations, and members of Aboriginal political organizations. In addition, information from the 109 interviews conducted between February and July 2002 for the report entitled *Uncommon Sense: Promising Practices in Urban Aboriginal Policy-Making and Programming* (Hanselmann 2002) was taken into consideration as a result of overlap between the two sets of information. Interviewees were asked to identify and discuss things – for example, policies, principles, committees, initiatives, agreements, guidelines, strategies, approaches, technologies, instructive resources, programs, and research – that seem to work for improving Aboriginal labour market outcomes, and to explain why these things seem to work. The data from the interviews and the literature were distilled to their common themes to identify ideas that work and that can be applied for Aboriginal people in the current labour market – i.e., promising practices. They are derived from qualitative methods in order to take into account the experiences and expertise of individuals directly involved in Aboriginal labour market areas, and to ensure the inclusion of factors not captured in quantitative data.

The promising practices pertain to everyone involved in Aboriginal human capital and labour market issues: educational program and service providers, employers, various government organizations, employees and members of the Aboriginal community. Although at first glance many of these ideas may not necessarily be new or innovative, the ideas were strongly emphasized by the interview respondents. Thus individuals seeking to increase opportunities for Aboriginal people may wish to re-evaluate current policies and programs to ensure that the "obvious" promising practices are in fact being practiced. It should also be noted that while the promising practices are specifically targeted to enhancing the employment success of Aboriginal individuals, they could be used to enhance the employment success of non-Aboriginal individuals. Indeed, many of the ideas and strategies are relevant to all human resource and development departments within the Canadian economy.

One final note must be made before turning to the promising practices themselves. Throughout the interviewing process, respondents noted that there is often a negative connotation associated with Aboriginal labour market conditions, and that this perception needs to be turned around. To reach this end, the discussion of promising practices emphasizes viewing potential Aboriginal labour market outcomes from a positive perspective. In the words of one individual "do not view this as a problem, but rather as an opportunity for a solution."

1. Perform comprehensive evaluations of goals, focusing on both individual and holistic outcomes.

Sustainable employment and development outcomes, and marketable educational attainments can only be achieved through proper consulting and planning. Discussing the needs and goals of all of the parties involved facilitates positive results.

i) Communicate with Aboriginal people on individual, family and community bases to identify career and educational aspirations.

When speaking about the network of circumstances within her community, an interview subject stated, "you don't know where to begin, what needs to change, or what choices are available to you; all you know is that when you look around, you do not like what you see."

It is important that all parties be able to identify and communicate their own interests clearly and effectively, while at the same time respecting those of others. As one respondent put it, "No one exposes the Aboriginal students to the careers that they want, or those that want them, prior to leaving school."

Some communities have addressed this situation by appointing career and educational liaison officers who act as a medium for prospective students, educators and industry. These liaison officers often improve the communication of mutually beneficial information between parties.

ii) Balance economic initiatives with development opportunities to achieve sustainable outcomes.

Private industry interested in doing business with the Aboriginal community may have a different incentive structure than Aboriginal people interested in promoting community prosperity. However, private industry may also have more experience in securing success, as a result of Aboriginal communities' isolation from the mainstream. Quite often new developments are undertaken that are not sustainable, such as temporary construction or resource development projects that only provide short-term employment to Aboriginal people in the region. It is important that the community, private industry, educators, and governments each do their part to assess and promote opportunities that will permanently benefit the individual, as well as the community. Criteria that are useful in determining whether an initiative promotes sustainable benefits include the creation of transferable skills for the individuals involved, in addition to increased employment and positive economic development, so that the benefits of the initiative extend beyond the boundaries of the project.

For instance, one respondent who delivers educational programs to Aboriginal communities recalled a situation where his organization had delivered a successful trade apprenticeship program to a few members of an Aboriginal community. One of the community's representatives later requested that the respondent train more of its members in that particular trade apprenticeship program. The respondent then discussed with the representative why it may not have been in the best interests of the community to have too many people trained in that specific trades area, given that the excess supply would lead to unnecessarily high levels of competition for work. He then suggested other educational program options that were more likely to have positive, long-term economic impacts.

iii) Take accurate stock of the human capital available by assessing skills based on life experience evaluations in addition to educational milestones.

One interviewee discussed how Aboriginal individuals are often refused employment based on criteria that all employees require a high school graduation certificate, even though they may be qualified for the position based on life experiences. In some instances, Aboriginal individuals with post-secondary degrees are refused employment based upon high school grade averages. It is especially important that educational service providers adopt policies that recognize life skills contributions, so that Aboriginal people may more easily satisfy program enrollment requirements, based on existing skills.

One post-secondary education program uses prior learning

assessment resource officers, who assess entrants' skills and award credits based on previous courses and life experiences. These procedures aid students in identifying which educational programs are best suited to their skills.

2. Facilitate the dissemination of information.

This promising practice is applicable to all parties, but primarily to government agencies. Throughout the interviews, one of the biggest perceived impediments to positive employment outcomes is a lack of awareness of what successful options are available to potential employees, employers, students and educators.

i) Promote innovative thinking.

Listen to communities and individuals in the service delivery sectors. New ideas often stem from experiences, suggestions and feedback. One interview subject discussed some innovative programs implemented by a provincial government such as televised broadcasting of employment training and dual credit high school and university programs. In addition the provincial government has partnered with private industry on ventures such as information technologies and mentoring programs for Aboriginal people over the Internet.

ii) Measure results both qualitatively and quantitatively.

Positive outcomes may be quantitative through positive educational and/or income attainments, lower unemployment rates or improved income levels. However, they may also be qualitative through improved individual self-esteem, higher community rapport, life skills improvements, decreased negative life chance probabilities, or improved living conditions. The absence of measurable improvements may not necessarily be associated with unsuccessful initiatives. One approach to ensure the existence of qualitative success is to measure results in terms of one person, one life at a time.

iii) Ensure the availability of communication infrastructure.

Common access to information is essential in guaranteeing all parties achieve the best possible outcome. One respondent discussed how various remote communities within the West do not have access to telecommunications technologies, let alone the Internet. However, providing computers and hard communications infrastructure is not the entire solution. Databases that act as clearing houses for potential employers and employees have proven to be successful tools in labour force engagement. Some governments and educational institutions have incorporated these ideas.

iv) Clearly define the roles, responsibilities and authorities of all parties involved.

One of the realities of Aboriginal programming and policy initiatives derived from the interviews is the presence of "grey areas" within agreements that occur as a result of unforeseen circumstances. When these situations are not properly addressed, it is the recipients of the programs who suffer. Some examples that came up in the interviews were jurisdictional issues over apprenticeship programs, relocation funding, high school equivalency programs and off reserve living allowances. When these situations arise, emphasis should be placed on taking coordinated approaches.

3. Reinforce the value of education.

Emphasizing the connection between educational attainments and positive employment outcomes, quality of

life improvements and reductions in negative life chance probabilities may improve individuals' propensities to attend school. This promising practice is applicable to all parties.

i) Focus on incentives.

Think about what it is that motivates specific individuals to attend school. The long run opportunity cost of foregoing educational attainments is often discounted in the present. Current employment income and financial support systems such as welfare programs may reduce individuals' incentives to attend school. One idea mentioned in the interviews that seemed to have multiple benefits was granting training allowances to students. A training allowance will create a connection between income and work, will allow individuals to maintain their current standard of living, as well as have positive self-esteem spin-off effects (e.g., "I am not on welfare, I am in a training program").

ii) Advertise to Aboriginal labour supply markets.

Promoting programs such as scholarship funds, apprenticeship programs and partnerships with educational institutions is an idea that seems to be positively related to educational success rates. As well, advertising the existence of role models and mentors in senior positions with higher education backgrounds serves as an indirect reinforcement of the positive effects of education.

4. Consider social conditions.

Interview subjects discussed the importance of social conditions. The "network of circumstances" surrounding an individual outside the workplace influences how they behave within the workplace. Some circumstances, however, are more applicable to Aboriginal individuals than to non-Aboriginal individuals. For instance, urban Aboriginal individuals generally have poorer health status, are more likely to come from a single parent family, and are more likely to have experienced domestic violence. As well, Aboriginal people are disproportionately over represented in homeless shelters and in the criminal justice system – both as victims and offenders (Hanselmann 2001). A factor frequently mentioned was the over-crowded living quarters and high migration rates common among Aboriginal people. One respondent said, "think about yourself in that person's shoes, then you may be able to understand where they are coming from."

Respondents discussed some of the less obvious social conditions that preclude positive outcomes.

i) Transitional issues.

The transition from living on reserve to off-reserve may be similar to emigrating from another country. Coping with the culture shock of different value systems, customs and languages may be overwhelming. An interview respondent noted that the federal government spends millions on programs designed to facilitate the transition process for international immigrants into Canada, yet this person was not aware of any moneys apportioned to Aboriginal people migrating from on reserve.

One individual discussed a cultural experience of transitioning from on reserve to an urban area:

> I moved in with a relative in the city to attend school, who told me that in order to get to the school I had wait at the bus stop in the morning, get on the bus when it comes, and then get off of it when it stops at the university. So when I got on the bus the next day and proceeded to take a seat, the driver started to yell at me; he told me that I

had to pay money to ride the bus. I gave him a five-dollar bill, and he responded that he does not make change, which I did not understand. I then sat down in the back of the bus and waited to see the university. However because I could not read, I had gotten on a bus that did not go to the university. I did not see my stop or know how to get off, therefore I spent the entire day riding the bus, and missed my first day at school.

ii) Life skills.

Life skills such as opening a bank account, budgeting, literacy, workplace safety, public transportation use and even the price system may be foreign to Aboriginal people transitioning from on reserve. As well, things like finding stable housing, childcare and domestic support, and career and addiction counselling may be an issue. Some of ideas mentioned in the interviews include public policy initiatives that finance programs, or provide subsidies to employers, or having employers set up their own programs, in order to minimize the negative repercussions associated with transitioning from on reserve.

iii) Family influences.

Throughout the interviews it was noted that Aboriginal individuals are often motivated by family and community approval. These obligations can take precedent over employee responsibilities. Parental and family support adds to the encouragement of the individual within labour markets; the proximity of the community to the workplace may influence individuals' employment decisions. As well, one of the things that worked was familiarity between the families of Aboriginal employees and their employers.

5. Display patience, tolerance and understanding.

Interview respondents cited a lack of understanding between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals as a hindrance to successful employment outcomes for Aboriginal individuals. Unique histories, value systems, upbringings and cultures may influence an individual's perspective. It is the mutual understanding of each other's perceptions and values that provides the foundation for the future success of all parties involved. One respondent mentioned that although the federal government has spent nearly $1.25 billion on primary, secondary and post-secondary education for Aboriginal people, to his knowledge it has not allocated any funding towards policies that promote workplace awareness initiatives for the general public.

i) Acknowledge and accommodate the existence of different value systems.

An interesting workplace experience that was relayed in the interviews had to do with an Aboriginal person who was employed in a managerial position with a private firm. This man had booked time off from work to attend his grandmothers' funerals on six separate occasions. The employer was prepared to lay off this individual as a result of the obvious falsehood of the claims - nobody has six grandmothers. However, when the matter was further investigated, the employer found that it was this person's culture to consider all of his mother's sisters as grandmothers, and thus each instance in which he booked time off was in fact to honour a different "grandmother."

Often educational facilities and workplace environments are unable to accommodate the value systems of Aboriginal people, which may be quite different from those of non-Aboriginal people. As a result, Aboriginal people may

have less interest in participating in educational programs and workplace initiatives.

ii) Encourage an engaging work environment - open the dialogue.

The most frequently cited factor regarding workplace conditions had to do with the comfort level of employees. One respondent, who consults with post-secondary graduates in the workplace, stated that the majority of those he has interviewed leave their place of employment voluntarily within the first six months, most of whom think about doing so within the first three days of employment. The interviewee went on to say that this high turnover rate is attributable to a fear of offending, whereby non-Aboriginal employees display an indifferent disposition to their Aboriginal co-workers and that in effect this approach only serves to reinforce the silos and myths that pre-exist between cultures. The interviewee further stated that Aboriginal individuals, on the other hand, may not communicate any discomfort that they experience in the workplace for fear of any negative repercussions, or of not being understood by their supervisors.

Thus initiating communication among all co-workers is the key to establishing trusting relationships and preventing misconceptions. This interviewee further emphasized that in order to minimize turnover rates and training expenses, it is important for employers to have an Aboriginal employment policy in place prior to hiring Aboriginal employees. Such policies can be general in their applicability, and developed and distributed by private firms or public agencies.

6. Build confidence, promote inclusion.

Respondents mentioned that an inability to identify one's contribution or role was an issue that influences the labour market outcomes of Aboriginal people.

i) Encourage a sense of community, contribution and rewards.

A topic that was often discussed was the concept of role modeling. Mentoring programs within the workplace and in post-secondary institutions result in positive labour market outcomes. One mentoring program in particular assigns a novice Aboriginal employee to train on the job with an experienced Aboriginal employee. This type of program helps to establish working relationships that nurture a sense of belonging, community and workplace support, and provides comfort to the new employee. The presence of Aboriginal individuals in senior employment positions further exemplifies the benefits labour market participation.

ii) Be aware of the role of identity.

Factors brought up in the interviews that contribute to positive success rates were self-esteem, a sense of individualism and of one's place within the community - all elements of "identity." As one interviewee stated, "One's identity influences how one performs; it may be derived over time from successes, positive experiences and from recognition by others ... people without success do not have identity." Individuals with defined roles and known contributions have less difficulty placing a value on themselves and on their skills than those who do not.

7. Recognize, reward and celebrate successes.

An idea that re-occurred in the interviews was the emphasis placed on acknowledging and celebrating accomplishments. Many interviewees spoke positively about concepts such as nationally organized celebrations and recognition events. For all individuals, celebrating

successes and achievements recognizes commitment and contribution, and reinforces identity and belonging.

i) Aboriginal people within communities.

Celebrating graduations, promotions and personal achievements through communication to family members, elders and youth illustrates the payoffs and satisfaction associated with one's endeavours. In the words of one respondent, "When an individual recounts their positive progress to the community, they not only inspire others, but they renew in themselves their commitment to their goals."

ii) Employers to communities.

When employers advertise to communities that they recognize and reward the contributions of Aboriginal individuals (through equitable employment income, the presence of mentors, workplace awareness, specific programs and sponsorships, etc.), it is reflected in Aboriginal individuals' increased affinity to work for a particular employer, through dedicated work ethic practices and positive word of mouth communications within Aboriginal communities.

iii) Aboriginal people to employers.

When Aboriginal individuals recognize and celebrate employment and educational successes, a message is sent to potential employers that Aboriginal people constitute a qualified labour force, whose skills and experiences are in high demand.

To summarize, Canada West's research identified seven promising practices to address labour market disparities:

1. Perform comprehensive evaluations of goals, focusing on both individual and holistic outcomes
2. Facilitate the dissemination of information
3. Reinforce the value of education
4. Consider social conditions
5. Display patience, tolerance and understanding
6. Build confidence, Promote Inclusion
7. Recognize, reward and celebrate successes

All parties can use these promising practices successfully. For example, governments could design public policies that promote education through incentives, mentoring partnerships with private industry, create programs that communicate education and employment opportunities, as well as programs that ease the transition from on to off reserve. An employer could ensure that its employment opportunities are clearly posted to Aboriginal communities, develop programs to assist aboriginal employees in transitioning into employment positions and (if relevant) to a new area of residence, partner with educational institutions for mentoring and apprenticeship programs, create a work climate that promotes inclusion and tolerance, and reward the success of its employees. Aboriginal communities could actively celebrate the success of community members, and encourage young people to take advantage of education and training opportunities. These are but a few examples of how promising practices could be applied.

V. Conclusion

Achieving Potential: Towards Improved Labour Market Outcomes for Aboriginal People has demonstrated that the Aboriginal population currently represents an untapped component of the labour supply market in Canada, one whose potential contribution to the cultural diversity and economic prosperity of this country is undervalued. At present, there are sizeable discrepancies between the Aboriginal and general populations on a number of educational and labour market issues.

Although participating in the labour force at a similar rate as the general population, Aboriginal people experience less success in securing and retaining employment, given that the unemployment rate of the Aboriginal population in the West is more than three times that of the general population.

In addition, the educational attainments for the Aboriginal population in general are characterized by a disproportionately large number of individuals withdrawing from school prior to earning a high school completion certificate. However, although a high degree of labour market disparity exists between the Aboriginal and general populations, the financial incentives of pursuing higher education are compelling. Not only does the proportion of Aboriginal people earning over $50,000 per year increase fivefold when comparing those with a university degree to those with less than a high school diploma, but the unemployment rate for those with a university degree is by far the lowest of all educational attainment categories.

That said, policies and programs designed towards improving Aboriginal labour market outcomes must be inclusive of all influential components, and an understanding of the attitudes of the general public is vital for governments and other interested organizations when communicating the importance of creating employment opportunities for Aboriginal people in western Canada.

Thus, the positive findings of the Looking West survey, which show that the majority of westerners consider improving Aboriginal education and labour market outcomes to be an important government priority, set the stage for governments to create policies and programs that generate increased opportunities for Aboriginal people in the labour force.

However, it is important that such initiatives focus on the incentive structures of individuals and organizations involved in the Aboriginal labour market, from employers and employees to communities, educators and governments; otherwise, limited resources and efforts will be inefficiently allocated. Targeting policies and programs to Aboriginal individuals' incentives cannot be limited to communicating the benefits of educational attainments and labour market participation; they must also consist of understanding the "network of circumstances" surrounding an individual. Factors such as social conditions, family and community influences, workplace alienation, individuals' aspirations, transition adjustments, access to financial or social support structures and sense of identity all influence decisions and outcomes. These factors must be taken into consideration if policies and programs designed to improve labour market outcomes for Aboriginal people are to be successful.

Hence, the promising practices for improving Aboriginal labour market outcomes presented in this report are based on successful ideas and strategies that have been applied to actual situations. They are effective in that they take advantage of the experience and expertise of individuals who know first hand what ideas work, and what ideas do not work, for improving current Aboriginal labour market outcomes.

The seemingly simplistic and commonplace appearance of these promising practices may undermine their significance, for while the promising practices parallel successful labour market strategies of human resource and development departments within any sector of the Canadian economy, the emphasis placed on them in the interviews and the current labour market conditions make it clear that these ideas are not simplistic or commonplace in practice.

Thus it is important that those with a vested interest in the current and future labour markets are aware that previously proven employment strategies may require re-evaluation to be applied effectively to Aboriginal individuals.

However, given that all individuals, government organizations, businesses and community members may not necessarily utilize the same standardized labour development strategies, it follows that not all of the promising practices in this report are applicable to all organizations in all situations; each set of circumstances may necessitate a different combination of promising practices, to be commissioned at the discretion of those who are directly involved.

Achieving Potential has demonstrated that there is an opportunity to address Aboriginal labour market disparities to benefit Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people alike, that western Canadians are receptive to taking steps to address these disparities, and that there are a number of policies, programs and practices that can be employed to help address the disparities. In light of current Aboriginal labour market conditions, combined with the relative youth of the Aboriginal population, it becomes clear that the economic and social ramifications of relinquishing the opportunity to improve the labour market outcomes of Aboriginal people will negatively impact the future Canadian economy. There is tremendous potential for all western Canadians in addressing the current disparities; what is needed is for governments, businesses and individuals alike to take the next step. CWF

Works Cited

Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions, 2003. *Second Actuarial Report on the Canada Student Loans Program.* Ottawa September. www.osfi-bsif.gc.ca/eng/office/actuarialreports/index.asp#cslp September 12, 2003.

Berdahl, Loleen 2003. *Looking West 2003: A Survey of Western Canadians.* Calgary: Canada West Foundation.

Hanselmann, Calvin 2002. *Uncommon Sense: Promising Practices in Urban Aboriginal Policy-Making and Programming.* Calgary: Canada West Foundation.

Hanselmann, Calvin 2001. *Urban Aboriginal People in Western Canada: Realities and Policies.* Calgary: Canada West Foundation.

#900, 1202 Centre Street South
Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2G 5A5
Telephone: 403.264.9535

www.cwf.ca